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The life and studies of Benjamin West, Esq. President of the Royal Academy of London, prior to his arrival in England, compiled from materials furnished by himself. By John Galt. Philadelphia, M. Thomas. 8vo. pp. 196.

THERE are not many individuals by whom this country has acquired a greater degree of celebrity from its being the place of their birth, than from the subject of these Memoirs. There are few artists whose works have been more decidedly popular, or more extensively made known by engravings. The *Death of Wolfe*, for instance, has been more widely diffused than perhaps, any picture of the last century. This was the first painting which gave Mr. West celebrity on his arrival in England, from Italy; and as it was the first instance where the modern costume was introduced in a serious historical subject, its appearance formed an important epoch in the art, and established the character of the painter, as a man of genius. When we consider this gentleman's success, and the situation in which he was born, we can find few instances so remarkable in their contrast, or from which we should so little expect to see a similar character arise. If we were to select a probable origin for a President of a Royal Academy of Fine Arts, the last situation we should think of would be a remote, thinly peopled province, where luxury and the arts had not yet penetrated, and from an obscure village, to select a child of Quakers, at that time, practising all their original simplicity and austerity, and holding the fine arts in abomination; yet such was the origin of Mr. West. Without further reflections on this theme, which is rather a fruitful one, we shall abbreviate the narrative of the author, and give a rapid sketch of the early events of the painter's life, from the work before us.

Mr. West was born near Springfield, in Chester county, Pennsylvania, October 10th, 1738. The family emigrated to America in 1699. Mr. West's birth was a striking proof of the force of oratory, since it was immediately owing to the powerful manner in which his mother was excited, by the preaching of a celebrated speaker among the Quakers, in which he was developing, in a prophetick and enthusiastick style, the future glories of America.

This circumstance of his birth was a subject of conversation, and made a strong impression on the family and friends; the ardent preacher, when on a visit a few days after, naturally enough predicted that the child, whom he had been thus instrumental in introducing into the world, would be no ordinary man, and he charged his father to watch over his character with the utmost degree of paternal solicitude; an injunction which was not lost upon him.

He made his first effort at delineation in his seventh year, at a time when he had never seen a picture or an engraving. An elder married sister had come to make a visit to her parents, and brought her infant with her. This child, placed in the cradle, was left in care of the boy, while its mother and grandmother went out for a few minutes. The child smiled in its sleep, and its beauty attracted his attention forcibly; observing some paper and pens, with red and black ink, on the table, he made an attempt to draw the countenance—hearing the approach of his mother and sister, he attempted to conceal what he had been doing, but perceiving his confusion, they questioned him, and the paper was produced, with an entreaty to his mother not to be angry—she looked at the drawing with evident pleasure, and said to her daughter, “I declare he has made a likeness of our little Sally,” and kissed him with fondness and satisfaction. This drawing must have had merit, since its likeness was thus perceived, and it is interesting, as being the first impulse of genius in a man who became afterwards so celebrated.

Soon after this event, he was sent to school, and allowed to draw with pen and ink. In the course of the summer, a party of Indians paid their annual visit to Springfield, and being amused with his sketches of birds and flowers, they taught him to prepare the red and yellow colours, with which they painted their ornaments; his mother gave him indigo, and he thus became possessed of the three primary colours; we may say with the author on this occasion, that “a painter who would embody the metaphor of an artist instructed by nature, could scarcely imagine any thing more picturesque, than the real incident of the Indians instructing West to prepare the prismatic colours.”

His drawings attracted the attention of the neighbours, and some of these regretting that he had no pencils, he inquired what they were, and was told that they were made of Camel's hair drawn into a quill. As there were no Camels in America, a favourite black cat, of his father's, suggested a substitute. Grimalkin's tail first, and then her back, supplied his wants, till his father observed the condition of his favourite, and lamented it as the effect of disease; the young artist with proper contrition explained the cause of the appearance, and the father was too much amused and delighted with his boy's ingenuity to express any anger. A Quaker from Philadelphia, Mr. Pennington, seeing the drawings of little Benjamin, on a visit he made the family, sent him, on his return, a box of paints and pencils, some pieces of canvas, and six engravings. The arrival of this box excited in him the utmost rapture, but his emotions were particularly roused by the sight of the engravings, never having seen one before, or knowing that such things existed. He kept the box by his bedside during the night, frequently rising to touch and know that it was safe, and at day-light removed it to a garret, and immediately began to copy the engravings on the canvas. He absented himself from school, and when the schoolmaster complained, his mother recollected seeing him often go up stairs, and went up to the garret, where she found him at work, and that he had formed a composition out of two of the engravings. She was so delighted with these, that she kissed him in a transport of affection, and excused him to the schoolmaster. This unfinished sketch is still in Mr. West's possession, and the author speaks of having seen it in the same room with that sublime performance, "Christ rejected," sixty-seven years afterwards. An anecdote of this kind shews a strong vocation for his art, and the faculty must have been almost innate, which was thus exerted, without having seen any models to excite imitation.

A friend lent him the works of Fresnoy and Richardson; the perusal of these heightened his enthusiasm, and an amusing anecdote is given of this effect, which we shall extract.

“ The effect of the enthusiasm inspired by Richardson and Fresnoy may be conceived from the following incident. Soon after the young artist had returned to Springfield, one of his school-fellows, on a Saturday’s half-holiday engaged him to give up a party at trap-ball, to ride with him to one of the neighbouring plantations. At the time appointed the boy came, with the horse saddled. West inquired how he was to ride ; ‘ Behind me,’ said the boy ; but Benjamin, full of the dignity of the profession to which he felt himself destined, answered, that he never would ride behind any body. ‘ O ! very well then,’ said the good-natured boy, ‘ you may take the saddle, and I will get up behind you.’ Thus mounted, they proceeded on their excursion ; and the boy began to inform his companion, that his father intended to send him to be an apprentice. ‘ In what business ?’ inquired West ; ‘ a tailor,’ answered the boy. ‘ Surely,’ said West, ‘ you will never follow that trade ;’ animadverting upon its feminine character. The other, however, was a shrewd, sound-headed lad, and defended the election very stoutly, saying that his father had made choice of it for him, and that the person with whom he was to learn the business was much respected by all his neighbours. ‘ But what do you intend to be, Benjamin ?’ West answered, that he had not thought at all on the subject, but he should like to be a painter. ‘ A painter !’ exclaimed the boy, ‘ what sort of a trade is a painter ? I never heard of such a thing.’ ‘ A painter,’ said West, ‘ is a companion for kings and emperours.’ ‘ Surely you are mad,’ replied the boy, ‘ for there are no such people in America.’ ‘ Very true,’ answered Benjamin, ‘ but there are plenty in other parts of the world.’ The other, still more amazed at the apparent absurdity of this speech, reiterated, in a tone of greater surprise, ‘ you are surely quite mad.’ To this the enthusiast replied by asking him if he really intended to be a tailor. ‘ Most certainly,’ answered the other. ‘ Then you may ride by yourself, for I will no longer keep your company,’ said West, and, alighting, immediately returned home.”

He now went on, constantly making a progress in his profession, till it became a serious question with the Qua-

kers, whether he should be allowed to pursue a profession so obnoxious to their narrow tenets. A meeting was held, fanaticism, for once, took the side of genius, and after an animated holding forth of one of the principal speakers, they all agreed he should follow the profession, the men laid hands upon him, and the women kissed him. This was in his sixteenth year; he then went on for some years, painting portraits for his support, till he had obtained means, aided by the patronage of two or three gentlemen, to go to Rome. He embarked from Philadelphia, in 1759, being then twenty-one years of age, for Leghorn, and from thence proceeded, with several letters of introduction, in company with a French Courier. On his arrival at Rome, he had the good fortune to alight in the house where there were one or two English gentlemen, who immediately "took him up," and he was introduced that very evening among the patrons and admirers of the arts; though every one, when they heard of the arrival of an American, to study painting, took him to be an Indian of course. He met with very liberal treatment and disinterested advice from the celebrated Raphael Mengs, the first artist of his time; and after passing three years in Italy, passed through France after the peace of 1763, and arrived in England. A good anecdote is given of his first visit to the Apollo Belvedere. The Italians having then no other idea of Americans, but that they were savages, supposed he must have received the education of one, and were curious to see the effect that would be produced on his mind, by these master-pieces of art; for this purpose an arrangement was made in the evening to accompany him to the Vatican the next day, which visit is thus described.

"At the hour appointed, the company assembled; and a procession, consisting of upwards of thirty of the most magnificent equipages in the capital of Christendom, and filled with some of the most erudite characters in Europe, conducted the young Quaker to view the master-pieces of art. It was agreed that the Apollo should be first submitted to his view, because it was the most perfect work among all the ornaments of Rome; and, consequently, the best calculated to produce that effect which the company were anxious to witness. The statue then stood in a case, en-

closed with doors, which could be so opened as to disclose it, at once, to full view. West was placed in the situation where it was seen to the most advantage, and the spectators arranged themselves on each side. When the keeper threw open the doors, the artist felt himself surprised with a sudden recollection, altogether different from the gratification which he had expected; and, without being aware of the force of what he said, exclaimed, "My God, how like it is to a young Mohawk warrior!" The Italians, observing his surprise, and hearing the exclamation, requested Mr. Robinson to translate to them what he said; and they were excessively mortified to find, that the god of their idolatry was compared to a Savage. Mr. Robinson mentioned to West their chagrin, and asked him to give some more distinct explanation, by informing him what sort of people the Mohawk Indians were. He described to him their education; their dexterity with the bow and arrow; the admirable elasticity of their limbs; and how much their active life expands the chest, while the quick breathing of their speed in the chase, dilates the nostrils with that apparent consciousness of vigour, which is so nobly depicted in the Apollo. 'I have seen them often,' added he, 'standing in that very attitude, and pursuing, with an intense eye, the arrow which they had just discharged from the bow.' This descriptive explanation did not lose by Mr. Robinson's translation. The Italians were delighted, and allowed, that a better criticism had rarely been pronounced on the merits of the statue."

There is no great painter who has ever covered so much canvas as Mr. West with his own hand. Many of the celebrated artists of Italy and Flanders only sketched a great part of the pictures which bear their name, which were then painted by their scholars, the master giving the finishing touch; but all the great works produced by Mr. West have been wholly painted by himself, and when the number of these is considered, it will be found, that fifty years of steady and ardent application were necessary for the purpose. Under great simplicity of manners, the presence of genius is soon recognised by those who converse with Mr. West on any of the fine arts. His life has been one of devoted enthusiastick pursuit of his profession, and

he has always maintained a spotless purity of character ; and if he has lived to enjoy the appreciation of his merits by the publick, and to receive more magnificent pecuniary rewards for his works than any other artist, envy itself will be disarmed, when it is considered that these rewards and this admiration are given to a man, whose genius seems brighter at the close of life, and who, bordering on fourscore, still composes with all the fire of youth, and labours with all the assiduity of manhood. Of his merits, as a painter, we do not now mean to speak, his colouring is doubtless defective, but his drawings, his sketches, and these are the trials of genius, are, we believe, admitted by all to be surpassed by no artist of his time.

This work is an interesting one, but we object to its style ; the anecdotes of Mr. West's life might be so spoken of, if he were dead ; but in his lifetime many of the expressions are misplaced. What would be only justice, "*post mortem*," will, during his lifetime, be apt to implicate him in Mr. Galt's want of taste, and give to some of the passages an appearance of inflated vanity.



*M. Tullii Ciceronis Opera Omnia, etc. etc. Tom. XX.
Bostoniæ, Wells et Lilly.*

WE have, on a former occasion, written a few lines to call the attention of all the friends of classick learning, to this honourable undertaking of our publishers ; which is now in an advanced state, by the publication of the present volume, which completes the works of Cicero. Their original design was to produce an entire edition of the Latin Classics. We hope the patronage of the publick will enable them to carry it into execution. Though this edition consists of only seven hundred and fifty copies, yet in so voluminous a work, a considerable capital is involved, as the aggregate of Cicero, alone, amounts to fifteen thousand volumes. It is their intention to commence the publication of Tacitus, from the text of Oberlin, the next spring, under the liberal patronage of the University at Cambridge, to whom they have been already much indebted. It is worthy of remark,